

NEWS RELEASE

April 22, 2002

Contact: Jim Springer 801-538-5324

FIRE OFFICIALS URGE CAUTION

Utah's 2002 fire season may already be setting a new record, as the earliest and most intense in recent memory. A drought throughout most of the state has left vegetation extremely dry and conditions are especially hazardous in central and southern region. Fire officials urge caution with all forms of fire.

"In my 30 years I can't remember this many fires so early in the year that have burned with such intensity," said Dave Dalrymple, fire management coordinator for the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. "The situation is even more serious because all the resources necessary to fight these fires are not available this early in the season."

A recent blaze near Parowan in Iron County, and another in Washington City last month, are just two examples of fire behavior not normally seen until late June or July. Fire crews have responded to dozens of smaller fires throughout the southern and central areas of the state.

Even with additional moisture it just won't make much difference," added Dalrymple. "The ground and vegetation is just so dry that it would take at least a couple of above-average water years to reduce the threat."

Citizens are being asked to be extra careful. Ensure campfires are completely out and don't carelessly discard smoking materials. Other often over-looked causes of wildland fire include vehicle catalytic converters and exhausts on all-terrain vehicles.

A closed fire season has already been instituted for Beaver, Garfield, Washington, Iron and Kane Counties, effective April 15, 2002 and extending through October 31, 2002. A closed fire season requires that any open burning be done only by first securing a permit.

###